

# ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S mystery magazine

## CONTENTS

### NOVELETTE

MEMORY OF A MURDER *by Clark Howard* ..... 140

### SHORT STORIES

JACK B. DAGGETT'S LAMENT <i>by Frank Sisk</i> .....	2
KILLER IN TOWN <i>by Max Van Derveer</i> .....	21
THE WAITING ROOM <i>by Charles W. Runyon</i> .....	34
PARDON MY DEATH RAY <i>by Jack Ritchie</i> .....	42
A LITTLE TIME OFF <i>by Stephen Wasylyk</i> .....	46
THE SECRET SAVANT <i>by Edward D. Hoch</i> .....	58
SCREAM ALL THE WAY <i>by Michael Collins</i> .....	66
THIEF IN THE NIGHT <i>by Carroll Mayers</i> .....	81
GO AHEAD AND TALK <i>by Liane Keen</i> .....	88
THE ATTITUDE OF MURDER <i>by Nedra Tyre</i> .....	98
POOF! <i>by Syd Hoff</i> .....	113
HAND <i>by William Brittain</i> .....	119
DOING HIS HAMLET THING <i>by Lee Chisholm</i> .....	133

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iate Editor  
on Director  
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*Sufficient is the evidence that other life forms may be friendly indeed.*



*by*  
**Jack Ritchie**

**H** E HAD been talking for fifteen minutes and we were now at the point of recapitulation.

"I guess you could call it a death ray," AmBurrri said. "Anyway, that's what *we* call it in Tragla Galaxy."

Laura continued skeptical. "In Earth miles, how long did you say this death ray is?"

"Approximately 200,000, and traveling at the speed of light, of course."

I wiped some lipstick from my face. "How did you manage to beat it here?"

"We use the twelfth dimension." He smiled diffidently. "To tell you the truth, I don't fully understand it myself. I just follow instructions."

Laura had been figuring. "Earth would be subjected to the death ray for only about a second?"

"Believe me," AmBurrri said, "that's more than enough."

"When did you say this death

ray is supposed to be asked.

AmBurrri said, "I was in the pockets until I came out on paper again. At that time, at exactly the same seconds after That's Central."

"How did you get to the university site?" Laura asked.

"Our computer point on earth is the best index of information."

Laura seemed to think it might be true.

"No," AmBurrri said. "We were far down about the laboratory. It seemed almost impossible."

"It's a Saturday game," AmBurrri said. "Everybody's playing."

"You are asking me," Laura said.

"No," Laura said. "AmBurrri wandered through the corridors and I was gone until I was found."

I was still in the room. I have knocked over the table. Someday it may be my eye."

Laura turned and said, "I can stop this."

"Nothing, I can't stop it. One in our galaxy."

PARDON MY DEATH RAY

ray is supposed to arrive here?" I asked.

AmBurrri searched through his pockets until he found the slip of paper again. "In terms of your time, at exactly ten minutes and ten seconds after eight p.m. tonight. That's Central Standard Time."

"How did you happen to choose the university as your landing site?" Laura asked.

"Our computers sniffed out this point on earth as having the highest index of intelligence."

Laura seemed surprised. "You'd think it might be Harvard or Yale."

"No," AmBurrri said. "They were far down our list." He looked about the laboratory. "The campus seemed almost deserted."

"It's a Saturday afternoon," Laura said. "Everybody's at the football game."

"You are students?" AmBurrri asked.

"No," Laura said. "Instructors."

AmBurrri nodded absently. "I wandered through all kinds of corridors and I thought everybody was gone until I heard your voices."

I was still irritated. "You should have knocked at the door first. Someday it might save you a black eye."

Laura turned the subject. "Nothing can stop the death ray?"

"Nothing, I'm afraid. At least no one in our galaxy has been able to

come up with anything so far . . ."

I smiled thinly. "And just what is Earth supposed to do now?"

"Well, I suppose you could all get into spaceships and evacuate the planet. For one second, at least."

"We haven't gotten up to the spaceship age yet," Laura said.

AmBurrri rubbed his chin. "I can see that you have a problem."

I walked around him—figuratively, at least. "You look pretty human to me."

He smiled comfortably. "When in Rome, do as the Romans do. Or, to put it another way, I came as an Equivalent."

"Equivalent?"

"Yes. Exactly equivalent to what I'd be if I should have been an Earthling."

AmBurrri appeared to be pushing sixty and was thin-boned and graying.

"What do you look like in your own galaxy?" Laura asked.

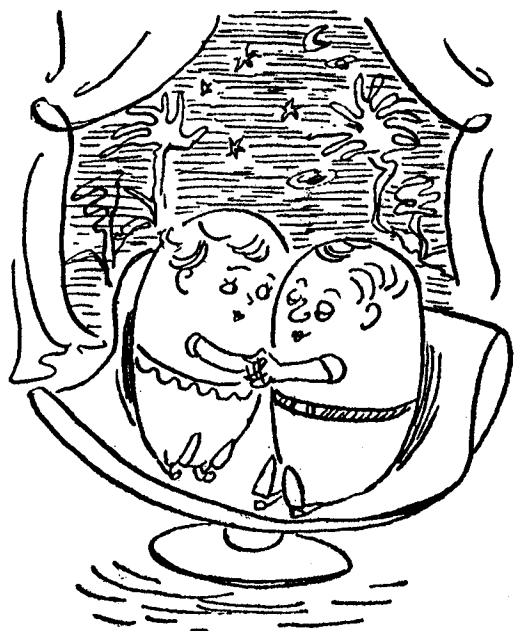
"Well, evolution is a pretty consistent process just about anywhere and gradually our craniums took over. While we still have arms and legs, they are diminished and physical ambulation is difficult. At rest, we rather resemble large eggs."

I looked out of a window. "Is there anything like a sex life?"

He pursed his lips thoughtfully. "You mean fralalee-odling? Well, being shaped like eggs . . . I mean

that while it's still possible, it's more of a . . ."

Laura smiled quickly. "You must be a dreadfully warlike people, what with this death ray and all."



"Good galaxies, no," AmBurrri said. "We are extremely peaceable. But we were faced with an embarrassing dilemma. You see, scientific progress is depressingly consecutive and one thing fatalistically follows another. However, there was a time-lag in the course of our technological know-how and it just so happened that we did not reach the death-ray stage of development until ninety-seven years after intergalactic peace had been irrevocably declared."

He appealed to us for sympathy. "You've got to understand our situation. You know how it is? A thing may look good on paper, but

there's always the nagging question, 'Will it *really* work?' And here we were with the death ray and we felt we simply had to try it at least once."

"And so you aimed it at Earth and pressed the button?" Laura asked.

"Oh, no," AmBurrri said. "Nothing like that at all. However, we did decide that the only safe place to try the death ray would have to be in space. So we orbited a capsule loaded with protozoa around one of our dead planets and exposed it to the death ray. The project was a complete success and now we plan to relegate the death ray apparatus to our museum. Without the batteries, of course."

He appeared embarrassed. "We thought the death ray would just go shooting harmlessly off into space and eventually disintegrate in this galaxy. Imagine our surprise and shock when one of us discovered that there is life—as we know it—on this planet Earth."

We were silent for a while and then I said, "AmBurrri, I'd like to speak to you alone for a moment."

When we were in the corridor, I said, "And now that we have your information, just what do you expect us to do with it?"

"Well . . . warn the people, I suppose."

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fense against the ray, is there?"

He thought about that for a while and then sadly nodded. "I guess you're right. Perhaps it might be more humane if they really didn't know what was going to happen tonight."

I watched AmBurrri make his way down the corridor toward the exit.

When I reentered the laboratory, I smiled. "You've got to humor him."

She blinked. "Humor him?"

"Of course," I said. "That was Professor Mulligan."

She searched her memory. "Never heard of him."

"Before your time," I said. "He's retired now, but occasionally he slips away from his guardian. Perfectly harmless, but he does come up with some of the wildest stories."

That evening, I took Laura to a restaurant.

Toward eight, I found my eyes wandering toward the wall clock.

Laura was thoughtful. "You don't suppose that Professor Mulligan really knows . . ."

"Of course not," I said firmly. Nevertheless, my eyes remained on the clock. At eight-ten, the second hand touched twelve and moved on. I found myself counting down: Ten . . . nine . . . eight . . . seven . . . six . . . five . . . four . . . three . . . two . . . one . . . *zero!*

Nothing happened.

At two a.m., I closed my eyes and concentrated on communications with my own galaxy of Zelarnias.

My area commander, Ompluilla, answered. "Nothing to it," he said. "As per your suggestion, we deflected the death ray with our K-M3 Unidee. Something Tragla Galaxy obviously hasn't gotten around to developing yet."

I thanked him again.

"Look," he said. "It seems to me that you should have been done with that research you're doing on the Earthlings long ago. What's keeping you there?"

I listened to Laura's deep-sleep breathing for a moment. "Oh, I don't know," I said. "I guess it's just all of that fralalee-odling."

